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BOOK REVIEWS

Corruption and Norms. Why Informal Rules Matter, edited by Ina Kubbe and Annika Engelbert, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 370.

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International policy-making forums often acknowledge that anti-corruption policies and strategies must consider the presence of local informal norms (e.g. Camargo et al. 2017; Banuri 2012). *Corruption and Norms* contributes to this notion, as well as to the existing subject-matter literature, through its different theories, case-studies and hypotheses, and a critique of the different norms that characterise corrupt practices across the world.

By analyzing the prevalence of informal norms over anti-corruption principles, the book successfully explains the challenges remaining in the fight against corruption, whilst simultaneously highlighting the breadth and depth of anti-corruption literature.

The edited volume is divided into three core sections; Part I starts with a theoretical discussion of how informal norms, social or cultural, shape the understanding of corruption, its acceptance or rejection by society, Part II presents a set of country specific perspectives across a variety of regions and settings, whilst Part III intro-

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duces the international dimension of the topic through a synopsis of cross-border instruments and practices surrounding anti-corruption norms.

With methodological rigour and often lengthy introductions to the different research guiding methods, the authors unite in their investigation of political, economic and social scenarios affected by corruption, illustrating how the former may be better understood through the analysis of specific contexts and prevailing informal practices.

The strong methodological rigour of the case-studies is, however, not always matched with an equally strong debate on the impact of the particular research findings or the very realities under analysis. It often appears that, if asked, most contributing authors would lack an answer to the “So what?” question (Selwyn 2014). For example, in *Micro-perspective on the Gender-Corruption Link* Alexander identifies welfare state and egalitarian values as favouring gender equality and honest elections, but does not provide a clear discussion on its meaning or consequence to the overarching debate. The different chapters appear targeted at confirming their own individual hypotheses rather than reflecting on the research’s impact and its relation to the edited volume’s guiding theme.

Gutterman and Lohaus’ chapter, entitled *What is the “anti-corruption” norm in Global Politics?* is perhaps closest to the overarching theme offering an interesting overview of how international relations (IR) shape anti-corruption principles and informal norms. The authors suggest that the implementation and diffusion of anti-corruption is an IR principle and that, as such, relevant policy-making encounters three core challenges, namely, *sovereignty*, *implementation* and, *discourse and framing*.

Albeit inadvertently, the afore-mentioned challenges – having been neglected by the editors – emerge as a commonality in all chapters. The majority of chapters embrace the concept of *sovereignty* as the most frequently used tool to reject external practices

derived from what has elsewhere been described as networks of experts lacking accountability and local know-how (Slaughter 2004). The country-specific case-studies, furthermore, demonstrate how popular rejection of anti-corruption reforms often results from the externally perceived nature of the norms, and the belief that, in the local context, these are not considered immoral or criminal.

Zakaria, Eiró, Simral, and Bu's discussion of religion, welfare, politics and trade as areas in which anti-corruption norms continue to find obstacles further stresses the ongoing challenge of *implementation*. In this respect, authors broadly agree that costs, benefits, morality or specific enforcement requirements are accountable for the difficulties in upholding anti-corruption principles and, therefore must be the focus of future strategies.

Finally, the challenges related to sovereignty and implementation are often sourced from basic *discourse and framing* issues. Johnston's recollection of Oskar Schindler's own corrupt behaviour in order to save the lives of thousands during the Holocaust is the archetypal conversation starter for Köbis et al and, to an extent, Koebel's thoughts on the South African reality. Broadly these authors discuss how the framing of anti-corruption in different settings, including moral, ideological and ethical implications may be key to the success or failure of any given policy. Generally, findings suggest that the premise "Corruption is detrimental and should not be performed nor condoned by anyone, anywhere at any time" (p. 361) is far from being widely accepted, or understood.

The purpose of the edited volume, through engaging with theory and applied methods, appears to be the confirmation that more importance should be given to the understanding of informal norms, their interpretation, and also adoption of anti-corruption standards and practices. Sovereignty, implementation and discourse emerge as key elements characterising the different discussions which, moreover,

find common ground in their identification of western bias. In essence, the debate over the role of sovereignty, enforcement, and discourse proposes that the real research question is not whether anti-corruption is a robust global norm, but to what extent it can be strengthened.

Avoiding a lengthy debate on the origin of anti-corruption and western bias (see Huntington 1993), another overarching theme of this edited volume is the perception that anti-corruption norms are indeed a “western tool” to pursue economic or political advantage. Chapters by Kubbe, Bu, Koeble, Gutterman and Stiernstedt and Button include reflections on how the origin of anti-corruption norms – if external to the society they’re implemented in – may disturb the effectiveness of implementation by failing to correspond to local standards of right and wrong, accepted or unacceptable.

Similarly, Jackson mentions, in relation to his analysis of informal norms in Kosovo, that leadership and trendsetters are crucial to change mentalities and behaviour. Stiernstedt and Button affirm that whilst “morality obviously has a role in any successful anti-corruption effort [...] it is important to understand the limits of norms and values” (p.362). Hough and Easton furthermore claim that the first step towards change is acknowledging the problem.

Contributors to this edited volume propose that the right balance between anti-corruption policies and informal norms can only be achieved through inter-state cooperation and the kind of dialogue most frequently practiced within international organisations (see Simral’s chapter on *The Strengths and Weaknesses of Political Finding Regulations*). Tackling the effects of informal norms, ultimately, calls for the coordination of action at the international level as discussed elsewhere by Barnett and Finnemore (2004) in their debate on whether international organisations can be standard and principle setters.

The edited volume offers an instructive view of corruption in its many forms, as well as an illustration of informal norms as challenges to anti-corruption. It calls for additional debate on how these issues are and should be managed at the international and local levels. Its depiction of how informal norms continue to shape individuals and institutional actors alike is an important contribution to literature, which should be further pursued not just as an academic exercise but with a view to promote change and the progressive development of anti-corruption norms.

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